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LAZARUS' ETHICS OF JUDAISM

Die Ethik des Judenthums. Dargestellt von Prof. Dr. M. LAZARUS.

Zweiter Band. Aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlasse des
Verfassers herausgegeben von J. WINTER and AUG. WÜNSCHE.

Frankfurt a. M.: J. KAUFMANN, 1911. pp. LV + 404.

WHEN Professor Lazarus issued the first volume of his notable work on the Ethics of Judaism in 1898 (English Translation, Jewish Publication Society, 1900-01) he included a table of contents of a forthcoming second volume. At the time of the author's demise in 1903, this second volume had not appeared. However, notice was given that although the manuscript had not received the finishing touches from the hand of the author, it was left in such shape as to be practically complete. The volume, edited by J. Winter and August Wünsche, the well-known collaborators in the publication of translations of many volumes of *midrashim* has now appeared. In their preface the editors state that they have published the manuscript quite as it was left by the author with the exception of having translated in full many passages from the rabbinical literature that Lazarus simply indicated. They also inserted other rabbinical utterances that might illustrate the thought. But further than this they did not venture. They changed in no manner the written words whereby the author had expressed his own thought.

Although granting that if the author had lived to complete the book, many a chapter would have been recast and many a point that is simply indicated would have been amplified, the editors yet claim that this second volume is not a torso in the real sense of the word ("Der Band ist kein Torso im strengen Sinne des Wortes"). I am unable to agree with the editors in this view. There are, it is true, many fine and illuminating thoughts in the

book, but there is much that is fragmentary, which the author would undoubtedly have elaborated, and much that is verbose which the author would just as surely have rewritten and compressed. The volume will add nothing to Lazarus' fame. I cannot but feel that those responsible for the publication would have been better advised had they not issued this posthumous work. In its present form it falls far below the masterly first volume.

The task of the reviewer of such a posthumous volume is difficult. It is most ungracious to write detrimentally in any way of the work of one who is beyond the power of reply. The present writer is most reluctant to incur the charge of such ungraciousness and therefore he will confine himself as much as possible to presenting the plan of the work and pointing out its leading thoughts as far as they appear.

It is cheerfully conceded that the plan of the work is finely conceived and carries out the original scheme of the author as sketched in the first volume. The second volume is divided, as was its predecessor, into sections, chapters, and paragraphs. Although this method may appear too formal to some, it has the advantage of presenting the subject-matter in clear and definite form and giving the work the scientific cast. The new volume contains two sections, the third and fourth of the whole work, viz.: The Path to Morality, and The Form of Morality, which is to be shaped. The former of these sections contains three chapters as follows: chapter 8, Permanent Qualities, Virtues (מדות) which should be acquired; chapter 9, The Manifestations of Virtue; Will, Self-Control; chapter 10, Duties (חובות) which should be fulfilled, or ideas which should be realized. The latter section contains five chapters, namely: chapter 11, Forms of Association; chapter 12, The School as the connecting link between the individual and society; chapter 13, Society; chapter 14, Circles of Society; chapter 15, The State; Mankind, and Messianic Hopes.

This plan is comprehensive and had the author lived to finish the volume in all its details, in accordance with the plan, he would have given to the world the most satisfactory systematic treatment of Jewish ethics that we have.

The best portion of the volume is the author's Introduction (pp. ix-xliv). This also has been left in unfinished form, but even in this form, the introduction sets forth many noble thoughts with that clearness of expression for which Lazarus was noted. As in the first volume so here also he demonstrates constantly that Judaism is permeated with the ethical spirit. The idealism of Judaism is indestructible. Woe unto the people, writes he, to whom a scientific ethical treatise with its contents is a novelty and teaches new things; and woe to that ethical science which is merely an individual production and is not the outcome of the spirit of the community. A work on Jewish ethics then, although written or compiled by an individual, must be the expression of the spirit of the Jewish people. And herein lies the peculiarity of the Jewish people, that its entire view of life is ethical. There are many who, while granting this, still doubt the necessity of a work on the Ethics of Judaism, because to their mind there is now a certain community and identity of ethical ideals among European peoples and the ethics of Judaism has been merged in the ethics of European life. But Judaism is here as a living fact and the essentiality of this fact is the ethics of Judaism. The underlying motive of Jewish ethics, as compared with that of other ancient peoples, is unique. The appeal of Jewish ethics is to the Jew; it is not for Judaism to decide whether others are to draw benefit from its ethical treasures.

The ethical spirit of Judaism is social. The value of the individual lies in his ability to identify himself with and work for society. To be holy means not to retire from the world and live in a hermit's hut or a monastic cell, but to reach out towards life's highest possibilities in social contact with the fellowmen. The ethical teachings of the rabbis are of a social character. They speculate little on abstract ethical principles and theories, but give expression to practical rules of life whereby the individual can advance the welfare of the society in which he lives. The necessity was never felt in Judaism to seek for a metaphysical foundation for ethical teaching or to connect ethical life with promises of reward or threats of punishment in a future life. The ethical warrant has been immanent in the Jewish view of life from the be-

ginning; all that has been wanting has been to cast it in scientific form.

However, rabbinical ethics is characteristic not only in that it is predominantly social, which involves as a matter of course the idea of the responsibility of the individual to society and to humanity at large, but also in that it is pervaded with the thought of individual freedom. The individual is ethically free as he is ethically responsible. His is the power to shape his life. Although it is well and necessary to teach the rules of morality, still all the teaching will prove of no avail unless those taught are receptive and of their own accord translate the teaching into action. The ethical experiences of past generations and the ethical doctrines of the great teachers are of supreme value, but they are theoretical at best, for each and every individual. They can be helpful and without doubt frequently are, but when all is said and done, the ethical life flowers only by individual effort. Each individual is an ethical entity and carves out his own moral experience. In a way, the ethical life is the individual self-expression of each human life. Freedom is its fundamental condition.

Here then is a seeming paradox. The ethical life bases upon individual effort but yet finds its highest expression in social service. Individual responsibility and individual freedom are its indispensable requisites, but the responsible and free individual must find the culmination of ethical effort in working together with other equally free and responsible individuals for the well-being of society. In the proper adjustment of individual freedom to social responsibilities lies the ethical problem of each human life.

This, however, is only superficial. In all truth, individual freedom and social responsibility are the obverse and the reverse of the same shield. The two must go hand in hand to make possible the highest development of the individual and society along ethical lines. Hillel pierced to the heart of the matter when he joined into one phrase the two questions: "If I am not for myself, who is for me? and if I am only for myself, what am I?"

Now it is in expressions like this that the Jewish ethical spirit found voice. There are thousands of such ethical teachings and sayings. They are expressive of the Jewish folk spirit which

has been a breathing reality for thousands of years. This ethical folk spirit has broadened and deepened with the passing of time. The fundamental thoughts have found constantly new applications. The ethical life has been continually enriched. Laws and institutions have arisen which embodied the ethical spirit. We have then a great multiplicity of ethical teachings and institutions. The underlying unity must be looked for in this great multiplicity. This, the author states, has been his purpose and his task. This underlying unity must be sought in the surviving literary and historical works wherein the ethical thought and outlook of past generations are preserved. These sources must be approached not with any preconceived ideas as to the fundamental unity. We may not read our ideas into these sources but we must discover the ethical principle which underlies the many manifestations of the Jewish spirit found in these annals of the past. It must be said, however, that the author himself is not always mindful of this. We have frequent interpretations which are his individually and are called forth largely by his own view of life. Then, too, as in the first volume, his predilection for the Kantian philosophy constantly appears. In fact, he says unequivocally that there are many similarities between Kant's fundamental ideas and the Jewish spirit and that through Kant one learns to understand the rabbis better. He is led to make the latter statement because of a criticism of his Kantian tendencies in the first volume. He grants that his interpretation of the rabbinical utterances has been shaped largely by the influence upon his thought, not only of Kant but of Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza. Were it not for this he would have found in the rabbinical utterances cast as these are in an exotic unscientific form, nothing more than have the generations since. We are unjust to the ancients, he claims, if we do not find in them modern thoughts.

The author asks what the sources are from which the ethical content of Judaism is to be drawn and what relation they bear to one another? (Introduction, p. XLVIII). Here the introduction stops abruptly. The author did not live to answer the questions and to finish this fine essay. But up to this point the author developed his thought fully and clearly.

Although the introduction is a fragment still it is complete enough to indicate that the author continues the plan and purpose of the first volume in this second. That purpose is to present the ethical spirit of Judaism as it appears in the life and literature of the Jews. Lazarus makes clear in both volumes that although the Jews did not systematize their ethical views still the ethical spirit was life of their very life, being of their very being. This ethical spirit expressed itself in a thousand ways, in aphorisms, apothegms, proverbs, sayings, parables, similes, anecdotes, and discussions, preserved in the great literature of bygone ages and developed in the varied life of Jewish communities throughout the world. These form the material for a systematic presentation of Jewish ethical conceptions on all the relations of life. Every proposition of the presentation should therefore be illustrated by the utterances of the sages and rabbis.

The body of the work is devoted to elaborating, in greater or less detail and in more or less finished form, the many branches of individual and social activity from the Jewish ethical viewpoint. It is impossible in a brief review to do more than indicate some of the points touched by the author in the comprehensive scheme of his survey. Throughout his work he is insistent upon the fact that in Judaism every activity of life is ethically conditioned; the prophets and sages wove ethics into the whole pattern of human existence. Herein he finds the Jewish viewpoint unique; note, for example, his illuminating statement on the contrast between the spirit of the Bible, the Jewish classic, and Homer, the Greek classic: "the Greeks gave their children Homer, we give ours the Bible The ethical teaching is rarer, weaker in the Homeric songs, yes, quite frequently the view-point is unethical since the most exalted beings sink into moral obliquity. I need say nothing of the power and depth of the ethical pathos in the Bible" (p. 36). The fundamental principle of Judaism, the knowledge of God, implied the pursuit of the highest morality (p. 11). The Jews of to-day must regain this point of view. When the Jews left the ghetto, the material values of life overshadowed everything else for them. They now share this error with many others. In this crass materialism they are recreant to the Jewish heritage (p. 171). The Jewish spirit declares life to be not merely economically im-

portant, but ethically far more so. This teaching must be brought home constantly to the modern Jews in their prosperity; they must interpret life in ethical terms. "Judaism and Jewish ethics must concern themselves in theory and practice with the larger activities, with the relations to industry and commerce, to learning and art, to society and the state Here Jewish ethics has only to climb to its own heights. The ethical principles of Judaism need be only reasserted, for these principles are of such richness and depth that Jewish ethics is the peer of any ethical theory that has ever appeared among men" (p. 175). Time and again the author asserts that it is the purpose of his work to teach and influence Jews (if non-Jews are also influenced, it is well, but this is not his main object), to make them feel that Judaism spells ethical conduct and that its ethical doctrines are equal to all the demands and intricacies of modern life.

This leads us to what may be considered the chief value of this second volume of Professor Lazarus' work, namely, the interpretation of the conditions of modern life in terms of Jewish ethical theory. To his mind we are witnessing to-day a return to the characteristic feature of Jewish ethics, namely, its social content. The predominant note sounded among men now is the necessity of social salvation; the welfare of the individual is dependent upon the welfare of society. This was obscured in mediæval life. Among Christians as a matter of course stress was laid upon the salvation of the individual soul in the hereafter rather than upon the salvation of society here. The Christian ideal was other-worldly. Among Jews, also, although for entirely different reasons, the ethico-social ideal was obscured. Owing to the exclusion of Jews from participation in the activities of the world in the Middle Ages, the larger aspect of the duties to society and humanity disappeared and emphasis was laid upon individual duties. In proof of this Lazarus asks the pertinent question whether in the Jewish ethical classic of the Middle Ages, the *Hobot ha-lebabot* of Bahya, there is one reference to the duties owing to the state, to society, or even to Jewry at large. The prophetic word, "I have made thee a light of the nations" (Isai. 49, 13) lost all significance. Under the changed conditions of to-day, this idea must again come to its own. The value of the individual life

then lies in the contribution to the welfare of the society to which its possessor belongs. All work has an ethical background, and the more conscious the individual worker grows of this the more does he advance toward the ethical goal. Lazarus elaborates this thought at great length and draws his illustrations from the professions, the home life, trades unions, employers' associations, etc., etc. Let a few of his striking phrases expressive of these thoughts be reproduced here. "Because the fundamental thought in Judaism is ethical association, the significance of the individual and of each individual action as contributing to the welfare of the whole looms so large on the horizon of Jewish life" (p. 302). "Who is my neighbor? He who needs my help most at this moment, and to help whom I have the power" (p. 222). "Man toils not only for himself but also for others, i. e. for society. This is the true inwardness of righteousness. Working for oneself in order to be able to do for others" (p. 223).

Although recognizing the worth of each individual life and the right of every individual to develop his own powers, still each individual receives his strongest impulses from society. To separate an individual from his environment, from his real and ideal relationships, is to separate him from himself. An individual *per se*, a personality by itself, is a mere abstraction, yes, a mere fiction.

What a man is, he owes largely to society, and he can develop properly only by maintaining a living, active relationship to society. It is here that the significance of the "law" that holds so large a place in Jewish life appears. The natural egoism of the individual must be curbed for the good of others; individualism must be conquered for the benefit of the general good; this is achieved through the law. The law is by its very nature universal; it is for all; and at the same time it is for every individual the strongest tie to society. By submission to the law which others must also obey, every individual becomes a member of the whole (p. 305). The all-important point is the spirit of law and the recognition by the individual of his duty to observe the law for the welfare of the society in which he lives. Still special laws may fall into disobservance with the change of conditions and circumstances. For

example, in speaking of the treatment of strangers, Lazarus says that there are prescriptions laid down in the Talmud which we to-day can observe as little as in talmudic times all the commands of the Mosaic law on this subject could be observed. But, and here is the all important consideration, "the ethical content so characteristic of the old law and which reappears in the talmudic ordinances we too must retain in our modern application."

The social ideal is strongly apparent in charitable effort. The underlying principle has continued the same in Judaism through the ages and remains the same to-day although the methods are changing. Emphasis should be laid, however, on the unique feature of the Jewish conception of philanthropy, viz.: that it should be combined with the idea of Justice, the underlying Jewish social concept. In the dispensing of charity, mere emotion may not be the guiding principle; consideration of the circumstances in the case and regard for others must also weigh in the scale. This section (p. 224 ff.) sets forth the many provisions for the help of the needy among the Jews. The principles of Jewish philanthropy as developed in the course of the centuries are remarkable for their sanity and their true grasp of the problems.

The mention of justice as the underlying Jewish social concept reminds us that this runs as a red thread throughout the whole work. The theme was developed in the first volume and appears constantly in this second volume as determining the Jewish ethical viewpoint.

In the eleventh chapter of the work, the author touches on such interesting themes as, marriage (p. 265 ff.), the position of woman (p. 268 ff.), the rearing of children (p. 275 ff.) hospitality (p. 277), the treatment of employ  s (p. 288), the attitude toward the stranger (p. 283), kindness to animals (p. 287), and the like.

In his chapter on education, he defines the school as the link between the individual and society. Here he has much that is interesting to say on the relation of teacher to pupil. In view of the difference among educational experts as to the advisability and method of ethical instruction in schools, it is interesting to note that Lazarus is an advocate of systematic, yea, even catechistic ethical instruction, as against the occasional and unsystematized

inculcation of ethical virtues. "If the true connection of fundamental ethical principles, or in other words, if ethics as a science has been so assimilated by the teacher as to have become a very part of himself, the ethical viewpoint will appear in every hour of his instruction" (p. 289).

The closing section of the book treats of the state, the nation, humanity, and messianic hopes, however, in very fragmentary fashion. Since the political conditions under which Jews are living to-day are so different from what they were in the biblical and post-biblical periods of Jewish antiquity, the political regulations of the ancient Jewish commonwealths have merely historical value for us, and can exert but little influence on our political thinking. For these political forms were transient; what is of value and interest to us are the ethical maxims which were contained in the political regulations. Lazarus contends that the idea of the state is inseparable from justice. The state must serve the idea of justice. Righteousness is the ideal, the state is the means for attaining this ideal. He here quotes the biblical utterance, "Righteousness exalteth a people" (Prov. 14, 34).

The book closes appropriately with a fine appreciation of the messianic forecasts of the ancient prophets of Israel and a confident assertion that these messianic hopes are neither dreams nor phantoms. Redemption will come, the messianic ideal will be realized when in that coming time "men, tribes, nations, and states will live in consecrated and loving union, when the words 'justice and love' will be not merely lip expressions, not mere breath and smoke, but the guiding force in the hearts of men!"

The book contains, as has been abundantly indicated above, many fine thoughts; true some of these are restatements and reiterations of similar thoughts in the first volume. This was unavoidable perhaps in a work of this kind, which sets forth the application of certain fundamental principles to many branches of life's activities. Lazarus was fully equipped for the task, for he combined, as have few others, a full acquaintance with the rabbinical sources with a thorough modern scientific method. Had the author lived to give final shape to this volume, as he did to its predecessor, we would have had in his work a *magnum opus* of

Jewish thinking and research. As it is, even in its unfinished form, the book is unique; the author has systematized the unsystematic individual teachings of rabbis and sages; he has co-ordinated the scattered thoughts of many generations; he has shown the underlying unity in a great and varied multiplicity; he has demonstrated with great wealth of detail the mighty truth that the ethical spirit has been the moving force of Jewish life from the days of Moses and the prophets through all the ages. Lazarus' "Ethics of Judaism" is one of the great works of modern Jewish scholarship; even in the unfinished form in which we have it, this work demonstrates as do few others the eternal value of the Jewish ethical viewpoint and the adaptability of the fundamentals of Jewish ethical teaching to the changing conditions of successive generations. To close with the author's significant words: "The modern element lies only in the form; it is mere appearance; the kernel is the same, if one will only take the trouble to pick it out."

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